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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: assistance to the Palestinian people

Question of Palestine

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2001
2-27 July 2001
Item 9 of the provisional agenda**
Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples by the specialized agencies and the international institutions associated with the United Nations

Letter dated 7 March 2001 from the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People addressed to the Secretary-General***

The Committee on Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People requested me to bring the following to your attention, as a matter of urgency.

As you are aware, on 20 and 21 February 2001, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convened the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, at the United Nations Office at Vienna. The Seminar was convened in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 55/52 and 55/53 of 1 December 2000.

In deciding to devote its first international meeting of the year to this critical issue, the Committee was guided by the overriding need to address the disastrous situation facing the Palestinian economy after months of violent confrontations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the dramatic deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The purpose of the Seminar was to review the state of the economy and to examine efforts by Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations to alleviate the ongoing humanitarian emergency. The Seminar also aimed at mobilizing greater support for the attainment of the legitimate economic rights of the Palestinian people in the hope of contributing to the broader peace-building efforts in the region. Given the special importance of the subject matter of the Seminar, it

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attracted a great deal of international attention and was attended by a large number of Member States, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as United Nations family entities.

In this connection, I would like to draw your attention to the regrettable fact that the four invited Palestinian speakers, including high-ranking officials of the Palestinian Authority, and several NGO participants from the Occupied Palestinian Territory were unable to attend this important United Nations gathering, owing to the general closure and travel restrictions imposed by Israel. Among those prevented from leaving the Occupied Palestinian Territory was Mr. Maher Masri, Minister for Economy and Trade of the Palestinian Authority, who had been invited as the official representative of Palestine and the keynote speaker of the Seminar.

The delegation of the Committee to the Seminar included Mr. Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla of Cuba, Vice-Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Walter Balzan of Malta, Rapporteur, Mr. André Erdös of Hungary and Dr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, as well as myself as Chairman of the Committee and head of the delegation.

On 21 February, at the United Nations Office at Vienna, the delegation of the Committee issued a statement in reaction to the prevention of the Palestinian speakers from attending the Seminar. In the statement, the Committee delegation noted with utmost concern the fact that the Seminar participants were deprived of the first-hand experience of the invited Palestinian officials and NGO representatives and of their assessment of the economic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory at a time of severe economic crisis and widespread hardship. The delegation denounced the illegal actions of the Israeli policy of closures, collective punishment and constant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people. It expressed concern that these illegal practices affected the work of the Seminar and might have further detrimental consequences for the programme of work of the Committee. The Committee delegation urged the Israeli Government to desist from illegal policies that jeopardized the dialogue of the international community with the Palestinian people within the framework of United Nations conferences and meetings. Our Committee is greatly concerned that such incidents, if continued, will constitute a serious obstruction to the implementation of the important mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under items 21 (c) and 53 of the preliminary list; of the Economic and Social Council, under agenda item 9 of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Ibra Deguène **Ka**
Chairman of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People